

choice

the magazine of professional coaching



From
Inclusion to

BELONGING

Why DEI isn't enough



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How can you coach leaders for cultural competency? What does allyship look like for a coach? For a client? Why does talking about anti-racism, social injustice and inequality have to be "messy and uncomfortable"? Where and how does racism show up in your coaching and in the life of your client? What is the psychology of racism? How can we as coaches support healing, belonging and racial equity? Join us as we explore why Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) aren't enough.

LACE

A guide for transforming how coaches engage with race

By Yvette Alex-Assensoh, JD, PhD, ACC, CPCC

What happens when coaches are triggered by the very issues for which their clients seek help? Consider the following scenario:

Robyn, a Black, middle-aged, straight CEO at a highly-respected global corporation, is one of your most engaging coaching clients. Together, you have worked on a myriad of leadership issues and a few personal issues, too. You have rarely, however, discussed race or racial justice. Since June 2020, however, Robyn has made up for lost time with conversations about everything from “complicity” to “imposter syndrome” to “being a global model for anti-racism.” As these discussions unfold, you notice a sadness in Robyn’s eyes and a tightness in her body. You tense up as well, so focused on running away from these conversations that you miss opportunities to be curious, reflect back or effectively partner with her. Who do you need to ‘be’ and what do you need to ‘do’ to serve Robyn’s needs?

Scenarios like these are commonplace in our profession. Yet, until recently, most coaching programs adopted a colorblind philosophy of not acknowledging race or its meaning. With the racial re-awakening of 2020, this approach is no longer acceptable. Successful coaching organizations are endeavoring to coach the whole person – including their racial identity.

What, however, happens to seasoned coaches without this skillset? To effectively coach clients like Robyn, coaches must be aware of their own racial identities and understand how they shape their understanding of the world, as well as the people and issues around them. That is where LACE comes in.

LACE[®], or Love, Authenticity, Courage and Empathy, is a model for raising awareness about racial identity, racism and racial justice in ways that allow coaches to better connect with clients and work together towards transformation.

Rooted in social neuroscience, positive psychology and the scholarship on teaching and learning, LACE taps into successes in other areas of life and encourages people to leverage past successes to meaningfully engage in racial justice. This self-awareness helps clients feel safe. In turn, that safety allows coaches to leverage traditional coaching skills of inquiry, intuition and reflection to evoke learning and transformation.

Here is how it works.

LOVE

Love is altruistic concern for the wellbeing of self and others. It leads with kindness and responds with patience. For coaches, it starts with recalling ways in which love is already operating in our lives.

Think: Recall an area in your life where you feel hopeful and comfortable with uncertainty. What is it? What will it look like to have a similar level of hope when thinking about and discussing race and racial justice?

Explore Kindness: In what ways are you currently kind to yourself? What does it mean to be kind to yourself in

issues of race and racial justice? What will it take to make this happen?

Explore Patience: What role does patience (choosing perseverance and restraint) play in your life? Where has it worked to create a better way of being, connecting, doing and changing in your life? What will it take to create patience around issues of race and racial justice?

Activate: Read Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without The Racist: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* to gain an understanding of how being colorblind perpetuates racism.

When coaches approach their own journey of transformation through the lens of love, they create a space for self-exploration that is critical for growth. Simply put, love and intentional or unintentional racism, bias and other forms of prejudice cannot coexist.

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With a settled mind, you are more prepared to coach Robyn in ways that enhance her wellbeing – including asking difficult questions without feeling guilty or self-conscious, recognizing her racial trauma and helping her cultivate an inner sense of patience. As both of you lean into love, you also create more opportunities to be authentic with yourselves, ultimately enhancing the coaching relationship.

AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is aligning our values with our behavior in ways that allow our true selves to shine through. When it comes to race, coaches need to identify their most basic values and assess how they are living them out regarding race and racism in society.

Think: Name the values that characterize you at your best. What do they look like when you embody them? What does it feel like when you show up in that way? What impact does it have on others?

Explore: What will it mean to practice those values around race and racial justice? What impact would you like it to make for yourself, family and colleagues? Is who you are when you are discussing race a reflection of the best version of yourself?

Activate: Listen to Maya Angelou’s four-minute YouTube rendition of “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1892). The poem shares how Black people felt compelled to wear the mask. Reflect on the universal behavior and impact of hiding aspects of ourselves.

Exploring our own authenticity vis-à-vis race and racism sharpens our intuition and ability to help clients navigate



THE VALUE OF LOVE

LACE, or Love, Authenticity, Courage and Empathy, utilizes lessons from social neuroscience, positive psychology and the scholarship of teaching and learning. In *Love 2.0: Finding Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection*, world renowned psychologist Barbara Fredrickson draws on hundreds of studies to show that love is the master value that loosens the hold of

negative emotions like fear and anger, while building and broadening our capacity for change.

Scholarship on social-emotional learning has shown that when love is combined with other positive values like authenticity, courage and empathy, it sets the stage for learning experiences that are transformational for individuals, teams and organizations.

the journey of racial justice. Authenticity begets authenticity in our clients.

COURAGE

Courage is moving through fear to be the coaches we need to be.

Think: Reflect on a time when you were stuck in fear and anxiety. How did you get unstuck? What does it look like to be comfortable with uncertainty? Think about an area in your life that has changed for the better? Were there times when you felt that things would never change? How did you move through these feelings toward where you are now? Who did you have to be and what did you have to do to?

Explore: How can you do the same thing with race and racial justice?

Activate: Read Peter Bregman's *Leading With Emotional Courage* (pp.89-96). Identify areas of growth and action for you with regard to racial justice. Draft a commitment statement that helps you to track what you know, what you need to practice and what you need to learn. Commit to learning, trying and reiterating (failing, failing better, succeeding) at a vigorous and challenging pace.

Coaches who can navigate through fear are better positioned to help clients like Robyn navigate the struggles of imposter syndrome, complicity and the work of becoming a global model for antiracism. Courage helps us see where we must push ourselves to best serve others.

EMPATHY

When dealing with racial justice, it is important to develop inner listening and awareness of how our bodies, minds and emotions are impacted by our engagement in self-work.

Think: Where in your life have you become newly aware of the pain, mistreatment or exploitation that others around

you have been experiencing? What was your reaction? How did you move beyond any embarrassment, shame, guilt or anger in order to identify your responsibility in helping to make things better? How did you take care of yourself while taking steps to show up and behave differently?

Explore: Working through issues of race and racial justice are uncomfortable, difficult and painful. In order to make this work sustainable, we need to engage in self-empathy – an ability to listen to and observe our own bodies, minds and attitudes in nonjudgmental ways. Self-empathy helps us see our role in historical and contemporary racism as well as other forms of oppression clearly. It helps us to develop the tools to enact change individually, interpersonally and structurally.

Activate: Read Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*.

Effective inner-listening equips us to co-actively evoke transformation for Robyn and other clients consistent with their own agendas.

So how will your coaching sessions with Robyn improve when you put all these values together? First, love will help you engage racial literacy, while doing it with the patience necessary to navigate inevitable struggles. Authenticity will align your values with racial justice, better equipping you to help Robyn align her values with her leadership goals. Living your values will inspire courage necessary to move through uncertainty by naming and pushing through your fears and modeling this behavior for Robyn and other clients. Courage opens the door to the inner listening necessary to better empathize with Robyn and help her better empathize with others.

Rather than feeling like running away, you are once again looking forward to partnering with Robyn to evoke the transformation she desires. ●